



Inspire Learning. **Unlock Potential. Empower Achievement.**

Dear Parent or Guardian,

The teen years are marked by a rollercoaster ride of emotions – difficult for teens, their parents, and educators. It is easy to misread depression as normal adolescent turmoil; however, depression (among the most common of mental illnesses) appears to be occurring at a much earlier age, and the past decade has seen teen suicide rates double.

In order to proactively address this issue, Linn-Mar is offering depression screening and suicide prevention training as part of the SOS Signs of Suicide Prevention program. This program has been used by thousands of schools over the past nine years. It has proven successful at increasing help-seeking by students concerned about themselves or a friend, and is the only school-based suicide prevention selected by SAMSHA for its National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices that addresses suicide risk and depression, while reducing suicide attempts. In a randomized control study, the SOS Program showed a reduction in self-reported suicide attempts by 40% (BMC Public Health, July 2007).

Our goals in participating in this program are straightforward:

- To help our students understand that depression is a treatable illness and help them assess whether or not they may have symptoms consistent with depression.
- To explain that suicide is a preventable tragedy that often occurs as a result of untreated depression.
- To provide students training in how to identify serious depression and potential suicidality in themselves or a friend.
- To impress upon teens that they can help themselves or a friend by taking the simple step of talking to a responsible adult about their concerns.

All 9th grade students will participate in one classroom lesson which teaches them to recognize the signs of depression and suicide in themselves and others. They are taught the appropriate response to these signs is to use the ACT Technique: acknowledge that there is a problem, let the person know you care, and tell a trusted adult. Following the lesson, they will have the opportunity to ask to speak with a counselor about any concern they may have for themselves or a friend. Counselors will then contact parents if follow-up is indicated.

Voluntary screenings will occur throughout the school year for students who have returned a consent form with parental approval. We are focusing on 9th and 10th grades for screenings, however, 11th and 12th students will be screened upon parent request. This component of the program will take place separately from the classroom lesson as this portion is voluntary. The depression screening tool that we are using concerns thoughts and feelings which parents may be unaware their child is having. This tool cannot provide a diagnosis of depression, but it does give an indication of whether a young person should be referred for evaluation by a mental health professional.

Please sign the enclosed consent form allowing your child to take a written screening test for depression and return it to the 9/10 office to the attention of Pete Martin. Forms can also be turned in during registration.

If you have any questions or concerns about this program please do not hesitate to contact me at (319) 447-3072 or pmartin@linnmar.k12.ia.us.

Sincerely,

Pete Martin, School Counselor

Jeffrey M. Gustason, Ph.D.
Principal

Kimberly Buelt
Associate Principal

David Brown
Athletic Director

Mark Hutcheson
Associate Principal

Joe Nietert
Assistant Principal

Tonya Moe
Associate A.D.

Chris Robertson
Dean of Students

Sheryl Cline
School Counselor

Greg Hall
School Counselor

David Kennedy
School Counselor

Elizabeth Kreher
School Counselor

Pete Martin
School Counselor

Jennifer Thurston
School Counselor

Todd Goodell
Academic Success Counselor

Kevin McCauley
Student Assistance
Counselor

Janessa Walters
Student Assistance
Counselor